

Preventing periodontal or gum disease

The most common form of periodontal disease is gingivitis-an inflammation that only affects the gums.

Less common, though far more serious, is periodontitis-a deeper inflammation that also affects the bone and ligaments that support the teeth.

Left untreated, periodontitis can degenerate gum, bone and ligament, ultimately resulting in the loss of teeth.

Research indicates that people with periodontal disease are more likely to develop heart disease-just like those with high cholesterol.

There is no cure for periodontitis, but the disease can be controlled and the symptoms managed.

Causes

Periodontal disease, like tooth decay, is caused by plaque bacteria building up in the mouth-on the teeth, gums and below the gum line. This is due to infrequent or improper brushing or flossing.

Anyone can develop periodontal disease, though it becomes more prevalent as people age.

Certain factors can aggravate periodontal disease. These include smoking, diabetes, pregnancy, changing hormone levels, stress, poor nutrition, certain medications, immunosuppressant conditions and genetic predisposition.

Signs

The signs of potential periodontal disease include:

- bleeding gums (after brushing or flossing)
- red, swollen or tender gums
- bad breath or a bad taste in the mouth
- receding gums
- loose teeth
- changes in the spaces between the teeth.

Prevention

Again, like tooth decay, periodontal disease can be easily prevented through regular check-ups and good dental hygiene.

- Regular check-ups will detect gingivitis early, treat gum inflammation and prevent the onset of periodontitis.
- Good dental hygiene habits include regular scaling treatments, daily brushing with a fluoride and triclosan toothpaste, flossing and rinsing with antibacterial mouth rinse.
- Thorough daily plaque removal and treatment will control bacteria levels and prevent periodontal disease.
- Eat a nutritious, well-balanced diet, and avoid sugary foods.
- Vitamin and calcium supplements may also be beneficial.
- Avoid smoking.

See also ...

- Personal dental hygiene plan
- Sugar & your smile
- Treating gum disease